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**APPLICATION  
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**TITLE:** FIBER OPTIC ATTACHMENT METHOD,  
STRUCTURE, AND SYSTEM

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# FIBER OPTIC ATTACHMENT METHOD, STRUCTURE, AND SYSTEM

## Background of the Invention

### 1. Technical Field

The present invention relates to an attachment structure and to a method and system for forming the attachment structure.

### 2. Related Art

Current methods and systems for effectuating attachment of optical fibers are inefficient and result in complex and costly fiber optic attachment structures. Accordingly, an efficient method and system is needed for effectuating attachment of optical fibers to form simple and economical fiber optic attachment structures.

## Summary of the Invention

The present invention provides a method, comprising the following steps of in the indicated sequential order:

melting an end of an optical fiber while the end is above, but not touching, an exposed surface of a substrate such that said end becomes molten end, said optical fiber being substantially optically transparent to laser radiation of a given wavelength;

moving the molten end toward the exposed surface of the substrate until the end makes physical contact with the exposed surface of the substrate, said moving being performed sufficiently fast so that the end is still molten when the end initially makes said physical contact

with the exposed surface of the substrate; and

maintaining said physical contact for a sufficient length of time to enable the end to bond to the exposed surface of the substrate with no intervening matter between the end and the exposed surface of the substrate.

5           The present invention provides a structure, comprising:

a first substrate having a front surface;

a second substrate having a front surface; and

at least one optical fiber having a first end and a second end, said optical fiber being substantially optically transparent to laser radiation of a given wavelength, said optical fiber  
10       being continuous and integral from the first end to the second end, said first end being directly bonded to the front surface of the first substrate with no intervening matter between the first end and the front surface of the first substrate, said second end being directly bonded to the front surface of the second substrate with no intervening matter between the second end and the front surface of the second substrate.

15           The present invention provides a system, comprising:

means for melting an end of an optical fiber while the end is above, but not touching, an exposed surface of a substrate such that the end becomes molten, said substrate being substantially optically transparent to laser radiation of a given wavelength, said optical fiber

being substantially transparent to laser radiation of a given wavelength;

means for moving the molten end toward the exposed surface of the substrate until the end makes physical contact with the exposed surface of the substrate, said moving being performed sufficiently fast so that the end is still molten when the end initially makes said physical contact with the exposed surface of the substrate; and

means for maintaining said physical contact for a sufficient length of time to enable the end to bond to the exposed surface of the substrate.

The present invention provides an efficient method and system for effectuating attachment of optical fibers to form simple and economical fiber optic attachment structures.

### **Brief Description of the Drawings**

FIG. 1 depicts a front cross-sectional view of an optical fiber moving through a feed nozzle, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 2 depicts the optical fiber of FIG. 1 with a portion of the optical fiber being engaged by a capillary having side clamps, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 3 depicts the optical fiber of FIG. 2 above an exposed surface of a first substrate such that an end of the optical fiber is being melted by an electric arc between a pair of electrodes, accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 4 depicts the molten end of the optical fiber of FIG. 3 being held in physical contact with the exposed surface of the first substrate after having been moved to the exposed surface of



glass optical fiber, plastic optical fiber, etc. The optical fiber **10** has any diameter known to be in use (e.g., *inter alia*, 2 to 4 mils diameter) by a person of ordinary skill in the art. The optical fiber **10** is being moved in the direction **14** toward the substrate **18** by moving means **16**, which is any means known to a person of ordinary skill in the art for imparting motion to the optical fiber **10**. For example, the moving means **16** may be a mechanism that grasps the optical fiber **10** and moves the optical fiber **10** through the feed nozzle **12** in a direction **14** toward the substrate **18**. As such, the moving means **16** may be, *inter alia*, a human hand, a wirebond-type machine, robotic means remotely controlled by hardware or software, etc. The feed nozzle **12** serves to constrain the optical fiber **10** to move in the direction **14** toward the substrate **18**. While the direction **14** may be a fixed direction and is depicted in FIG. 1 as being about normally directed toward the front surface **25** of the substrate **18**, the direction **14** may generally be oriented at any angle with respect to the front surface **25** of the substrate **18** (e.g., *inter alia*, 60 to 90 degrees with respect to the plane of the front surface **25**).

The method and system of the present invention will subsequently bond the end **11** to the exposed surface (i.e., front surface **25**) of the substrate **18**. Thus, the end **11** is a terminal portion of the optical fiber **10** that will subsequently become molten and be made to bond to the front surface **25** of the substrate **18**. Hence, the substrate **18** must comprise a material capable of bonding directly to the optical fiber **10** with no intervening matter between the substrate **18** and the optical fiber **10**.

The substrate **18** may comprise a laser source **40** that generates and emits the laser radiation that is substantially optically transparent to the laser radiation of the given wavelength.

For example, the laser source **40** may be comprise, *inter alia*, a Vertical Cavity Surface Emitting Laser (VCSEL) which emits the laser wavelength in a range of 780 to 1550 nanometers (e.g., 980 nanometers) from a region within the substrate **18**. Said region within the substrate **18** may comprise the back surface **24** of the substrate **18**. A VCSEL is a specialized laser diode  
5 emitting laser radiation perpendicular to the back surface **24** and offers low power consumption and overall improved efficiency as compared with conventional edge-emitting laser diodes. The substrate **18** is substantially optically transparent to said laser radiation in an optical path in the substrate **18** between the VCSEL **40** and the front surface **26** of the substrate **18** (see, e.g., optical path **26** in FIG. 4, discussed *infra*).

10 Referring again to FIG. 1, the present invention may include any type of laser emitting device that is capable of emitting the laser radiation such that the laser radiation may be transmitted from the laser emitting device to the front surface **25**, or alternatively the laser radiation may be emitted by the laser emitting device at the front surface **25**. As seen in FIG. 1, the front surface **25** of the substrate **18** comprises an exposed surface of the substrate **18**.

15 Although the front surface **25** may alternatively receive the laser radiation from above the substrate **18** and may subsequently transmit the laser radiation into the substrate **18** and potentially to the back surface **24**, the substrate **18** will be considered for illustrative purposes as a transmitter of the laser radiation rather than as a receiver of the laser radiation. The substrate **18** may include, *inter alia*, SiGe, GaAs, AlGaAs, or InGaAs.

20 FIG. 2 depicts the optical fiber **10** of FIG. 1 with a portion of the optical fiber **10** being engaged below the feed nozzle **12** by a capillary **20** having side clamps **22**, in accordance with

embodiments of the present invention. In FIG. 2 with the side clamps 22 in the “relaxed” position shown, the optical fiber 10 continues to be moved (by the moving means 16) through the feed nozzle 12 in the direction 14 toward the substrate 18 in such a manner that the capillary 20 moves together with the optical fiber 10 in the direction 14. The side clamps 22 of the capillary 20, if moved inward in the direction 15 toward the optical fiber 10, will cause the optical fiber 10 to move the direction 14 relative to the capillary 20 as will be apparent from the description *infra* of FIG. 4.

FIG. 3 depicts the optical fiber 10 of FIG. 2 above the exposed surface 25 of the substrate 18 such that the end 11 of the optical fiber 10 is being melted by any applicable method of applying heat that is known to a person of ordinary skill in the art such as, *inter alia*, by an electric arc 27 between a pair of electrodes 48 with an output power sufficient to melt the end 11. As a result of the melting, the end 11 becomes molten. The side clamps 22 are being squeezed in the direction 15 toward the optical fiber 10 so as to impart a compressive force to the molten end 11 causing the molten end 11 to move toward the exposed surface 25 of the substrate 18 and make physical contact with the exposed surface 25 of the substrate 18 while the end 11 is still molten. The melting occurs when the end 11 is above the exposed surface 25 and is not touching the exposed surface 25. After the end 11 has become molten, the electrodes 48 may be moved out of the way so that the molten end 11 can be quickly moved in the direction 14 toward the substrate 18. Alternatively after the end 11 has become molten, the electrodes 48 may be moved together with the fiber 10 in the direction 14 toward the substrate 18 (but not touching the substrate 18) such that the tapered shape (which appears conical in FIG. 3) of the electrodes 48



enables the electrodes **48** to move other optical fibers attached to the substrate **18** out of the way so as to clear a path for movement of the molten end **11** toward the substrate **18**.

In FIG. 3, the height  $H$  of the end **11** above the front surface **25** at which the end **11** is being melted must be small enough so that the end **11** could be subsequently moved from the height  $H$  in the direction **14** to make physical contact with the substrate **18** and still remain molten upon initially making said physical contact. Thus the minimum value of the height  $H$  varies as the inverse of the average transport velocity of the end **11** toward the front surface **25**. However, the minimum value of the height  $H$  is further constrained by space considerations. For example, there may be a multitude of such optical fibers (similar to the optical fiber **10**) or other structure bonded to the front surface **25**, and the number and spatial distribution of such optical fibers may interfere with the melting of the end **11**. Thus the existence of said multitude of optical fibers may increase the minimum possible value of the height  $H$ . Said multitude of optical fibers may be closely spaced such as having the optical fibers spaced, *inter alia*, 5 to 10 mils apart.

As an alternative embodiment, the substrate **18** may be preheated or otherwise heated in order to assist the reliability of the process of bonding the molten end **11** to the substrate **18**. For example, a large temperature differential between the molten end **11** and the substrate **18** may result in thermal stresses in the substrate **18** and potential fracture and/or cracking of the substrate **18**.

While FIGS. 1-3 show the substrate **18** as having been placed in a fixed position followed by moving the optical fiber **10** toward the substrate **18** in the direction **14**, the substrate **18** may

be alternatively moved into its position below the optical fiber 10 after the optical fiber 10 has been position at the height H.

FIG. 4 depicts the molten end 11 of the optical fiber 10 of FIG. 3 being held in physical contact with the front surface 25 of the substrate 18, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. Said physical contact is maintained by further squeezing of the side clamps 22 in the direction 15 toward the optical fiber 10 to maintain a compressive force on the molten end 11 so as to hold the optical fiber 10 in place. Said physical contact is maintained for a sufficient length of time to enable the end 11 to bond to the front surface 25 of the substrate 18 with no intervening matter between the end 11 and the front surface 25. The portion 36 of the optical fiber 10 is a terminal portion of optical fiber 10, said terminal portion 36 including the end 11. Note that the end 11 flares outward in directions approximately parallel to the direction 15.

After said bond between the end 11 and the front surface 25 has been formed and the optical fiber 10 has a connection at its other end 41 (see FIGS. 7 and 8, described *infra*), FIG. 4 depicts the VCSEL 40 in the substrate 18 as being adapted to emit the laser radiation.

Accordingly, the substrate 18 will transmit said laser radiation from the VCSEL 40 in the direction 28 to the front surface 25 of the substrate 18 via laser path 26 within the substrate 18. The laser path 26 is substantially optically transparent to the laser radiation of the given wavelength. The laser radiation may subsequently enter the end 11 of the optical fiber 10 and then propagates through the optical fiber 10 away from the front surface 25. Alternatively as stated *supra*, the VCSEL 40 may be replaced by a laser source such as a laser source emits the laser radiation from the front surface 25 into the end 11 of the optical fiber 10.

FIG. 5 depicts the optical fiber 10 of FIG. 4 being scored at a location 30 along the optical fiber 10 with a sharp wedge 34 to form a crack/ flaw 32 in the optical fiber 10, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The crack/ flaw 32 may be, *inter alia*, in a plane that is normal to the axis of the optical fiber 10 (i.e., normal to the direction 28). The crack/ flaw 32 may be generated by any other mechanical means such as by a combination of twisting and impact. Note that the capillary 22 has been retracted in the direction 28 relative to the optical fiber 10.

FIG. 6 depicts the optical fiber 10 of FIG. 5 such that a portion 37 of the optical fiber 10 is being severed at and above the location 30 at which the optical fiber 10 has been scored so as to leave a remaining portion 38 of the optical fiber 10, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The remaining portion 38 includes the end 11. The severing operation is facilitated by the presence of the crack/ flaw 32 (see FIG. 5) at the location 30. The severing operation may be accomplished by any method known to one of ordinary skill in the art such as breaking away, twisting away, snapping away, sharp impact at an angle that causes severing, etc. The severing may occur in the clockwise direction 40, or alternatively in a counterclockwise direction.

FIG. 7 depicts the optical fiber 10 of FIG. 6 after having been rotated so as to orient another end 41 of the optical fiber 10 toward an exposed surface 45 of a substrate 52, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The substrate 52 includes a front surface (i.e., the exposed surface 45) and a back surface 44. The substrate 52 is substantially optically transparent to said laser radiation at locations within the substrate 52 through which the laser

radiation propagates. The substrate 52 is bondable with the end 41 of the optical fiber 10 in the same manner as the substrate 18 is bondable with the end 11 of the optical fiber 10 (e.g., with no intervening matter between the end 41 and the exposed surface 45). The substrate 52 may include, *inter alia*, SiGe, GaAs, AlGaAs, or InGaAs.

5 Rotating the optical fiber 10 may be accomplished, *inter alia*, by concurrently rotating the capillary 20 (see FIG. 6) clockwise or counterclockwise about the axis defined by the direction 28, in concert with moving the substrate 18 in the direction 49, and in further concert with moving the capillary 20 (see FIG. 6) in the direction 14, so that the minimum bend radius of the optical fiber 10 is not disturbed. Any equipment known to a person of ordinary skill in the art  
10 may be used to perform the aforementioned concurrent motions. The optical fiber 10 is typically very thin and is thus easy to bend. Rotating the optical fiber 10 is a special case of orienting the optical fiber 10 in any manner so that the end 41 of the optical fiber 10 is facing the exposed surface 45 of the substrate 52.

While FIGS. 5-7 depict the scoring and severing of terminal portion 37 of the optical  
15 fiber 10 prior to said rotating of the optical fiber 10, the terminal portion 37 of the optical fiber 10 may alternatively be scored and severed after the optical fiber 10 has been rotated. On the other hand, if the optical fiber 10 has the desired length to begin with, then the scoring and severing steps of FIGS. 5 and 6, respectively, are unnecessary and may be omitted.

FIG. 7 also shows the end 41 being melted by electrodes 48 with an associated arc 46 in  
20 the same manner as the end 11 is melted by electrodes 24 with the arc 27 (see FIG. 3) as described *supra*. The capillary 50 with side clamps 51 in FIG. 7 has the same functionality as the

capillary 20 with side clamps 22 in FIG. 3. The purpose of melting the end 41 is to subsequently bond the molten end 41 to the front surface 45 of the substrate 52 in the same manner as the end 11 was bonded to the front surface 25 of the substrate 18 as described *supra*.

FIG. 8 depicts the molten end 41 of the optical fiber 10 of FIG. 7 being held in physical contact with the front surface 45 of the substrate 52, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. Said physical contact is maintained by squeezing the side clamps 51 in the direction 55 toward the optical fiber 10 to maintain a force on the molten end 41 in the direction 14. Said physical contact is maintained for a sufficient length of time to enable the end 41 to bond to the front surface 45 of the substrate 52 with no intervening matter between the end 41 and the front surface 45. The portion 57 of the optical fiber 10 is a terminal portion of optical fiber 10, said terminal portion 57 including the end 41.

The VCSEL 40 in the substrate 18 may emit the laser radiation as described *supra* in conjunction with FIG. 4, and said laser radiation enters the end 11 of the optical fiber 10 and then propagates through the optical fiber 10 to the end 41. The front surface 45 of the substrate 52 is adapted to receive said laser radiation from the end 41, and the substrate 52 is adapted to transmit said laser radiation from the end 41 into the substrate 52. The laser radiation may be then transmitted (via optical path 56 within the substrate 52) to any location within the substrate 52 along the optical path 56 including to the back surface 44 of the substrate 52. It is noted that the optical fiber 10 is continuous and integral from the end 11 to the end 41.

While FIG. 8 depicts one optical fiber, namely the optical fiber 10, being continuous and integral between the ends 11 and 41 which are respectively connected to the front surface 25 and

45 of substrate 18 and 52, there is generally N such optical fibers such that N is at least 1. N may equal 1 or 2, N may be at least 1000, or N may represent thousands or hundreds of thousands of optical fibers.

While the front surfaces 25 and 45 may be coplanar (e.g., in a computer) as depicted in FIG. 8, the front surfaces 25 and 45 may alternatively not be coplanar (e.g., the as with two circuit boards/circuit cards). If the front surfaces 25 and 45 are not coplanar, then the front surfaces 25 and 45 may be parallel to each other, perpendicular to each other, or at any nonzero angle with respect to each other such that said nonzero angle is unequal to 90 degrees.

While the substrate 18 in FIGS. 4-8 was depicted as being comprised by a first device (i.e., a transmitting device such as a VCSEL) and while the substrate 52 was depicted in FIG. 8 as being comprised by a second device (i.e., a receiving device), the substrates 18 and 52 may be comprised by a same device.

While the substrates 18 and 52 may comprise a same substantially optically transparent material, the substrates 18 and 52 may alternatively comprise different substantially optically transparent materials.

While embodiments of the present invention have been described herein for purposes of illustration, many modifications and changes will become apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, the appended claims are intended to encompass all such modifications and changes as fall within the true spirit and scope of this invention.